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ABSTRACT

As a first step toward making the library more responsive to the needs of the community's children, a guide was developed to help libraries compile a community information file. The guide provides a list of sources of information, a list of possible subject areas to be covered, and forms and letters to be used in collecting and verifying data from public and private community agencies and individuals willing to share their skills and talents. (LS)

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LIBRARIES:

CENTERS FOR CHILDREN'S NEEDS

A Practical Guide

for

Developing a Community Information File

American Library Association
Children's Services Division
Committee on Library Service to
the Disadvantaged Child

1974

Introduction

"New roles must. . . emerge for libraries. . . new resources must be tapped to broaden the child's view of his neighborhood, his people, his world."

White House Conference on Children, 1970.

Librarians who work with children realize that the community extends the library's capacity to meet the needs of the children. The following is a practical guide for use by librarians in gathering information about their local communities and for making this information available to both the library staff and to the public.

The techniques here were developed in a project conducted at the Washington Heights Branch and the Fordham Library Center of the New York Public Library. This project required no special funds or additional staff. It did require interested, concerned staff and the reorganization of the library's priorities.

The Committee on Library Service to the Disadvantaged Child suggests that librarians use this guide to establish an information file as the first step in making the library more responsive to the needs of the children in their communities.

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Begin by securing a supply of 3 x 5 inch cards and a file. See the sample cards in example A.

On these cards list basic information about as many community agencies; resources, and groups as you can think of. In your search, enlist the aid of colleagues and consult the following sources:

1. YOUR LIBRARY. Use adult reference, young adult, and children's collections.

   Federal, state, city and local directories
   Board of Education Directory, and equivalent directories for private and parochial schools
   Pamphlets and other vertical file material about community services
   Local and area-wide newspapers
   Telephone directories---yellow pages

2. OTHER LIBRARIES IN YOUR AREA: Regional, special, college, and university.

3. YOUR COMMUNITY.

   Walk around the neighborhood. Make note of newsstands, local bulletin boards, store fronts, churches, schools, etc.

   Consult existing files in other community agencies.

   Make use of informal contacts with library users, local merchants, staff members who live in the community, etc.

On one or more cards in the front of the file, list the following general information about the area your library serves:

Geographical boundaries
Total population
Age breakdown
Ethnic distribution
Religious, household, income profiles

Divide your community information file into various subject areas using these suggestions as a guide. Tailor your file to reflect your own community.

1. EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

   Preschool programs
   Public, private, parochial schools
   PTA
   Bilingual programs
   Other special education programs
   Extracurricular schools (i.e., dancing schools)
   School, public, academic, special libraries
   Museums and historical societies
   Children's theater groups

2. RELIGIOUS, HEALTH, RECREATION, AND WELFARE RESOURCES

   Churches and synagogues
   Y's, Boy's Clubs, Girl and Boy Scouts, etc.
   Youth centers
   Hospitals, first aid units, public health agencies
   Drug centers
   Welfare centers

Salvation Army
After School programs
organized sports programs

3. GOVERNMENTAL AND POLITICAL UNITS

Local, state, and federal officials
Police department
Fire department
Political clubs
Courts and correctional facilities
Community planning boards

4. ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICE CLUBS

Rotary, Lions Clubs, Elks Clubs, etc.
Sororities and fraternities
Senior Citizens groups
Volunteer bureaus
Urban League
Jaycees

5. BUSINESS GROUPS

Chamber of Commerce
Banks
Local businesses and industries (group tours, career resource people)

6. COMMUNICATIONS

Radio and television stations
Newspapers

7. UNAFFILIATED INDIVIDUALS

Local artists, persons with specialized skills or talents and individual volunteers
Consultants in special interest areas

Because the information obtained from various sources may be dated, verify it through telephone contact or by letter. See the sample letter and postcard (examples B and C.) Enclose promotional material about the library with your letter. Once verified, make the community information file available to the library staff and to the public.

Those agencies whose resources are primarily devoted to serving children should have additional follow-up.

Use the sample profile sheet (example D) as an interview guide. Type the information obtained in the interview on the profile sheet and send it along with the sample letter (example E) to the agency. After the information has been seen by the agency, put the profile sheet in a looseleaf notebook or a vertical file and make it available to the public.

Publicize the information you have gathered through bulletin board displays, flyers, and newspaper releases. If funds permit and the need is apparent, consider publishing a community directory.

In addition to providing sources of up-to-date neighborhood information, your interviews and contacts may serve as a basis for informational exchanges, idea sharing, and cooperative program planning. In this way the library, working with the total community, can extend and improve its services to all children.

Example A: CARD FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

PHONE:

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:

ADDRESS:

HEAD OF ORGANIZATION:

CONTACT PERSON:

TYPE OF SERVICE:

CHARGES:

HOURS:

DATE INFORMATION VERIFIED:

Example A: CARD FOR COMMUNITY INDIVIDUALS

PHONE:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

AREA OF INTEREST
OR TALENT:

AVAILABILITY:

DATE:

Example B: FIRST LETTER OF VERIFICATION

LETTERHEAD

Dear

The (name of library) is asking your help in broadening its services to our community. As a first step, we are updating our information about community agencies.

We would appreciate it if you would complete the enclosed postcard and return it to us by (date). Please feel free to send any additional information which you have available.

Thank you for assisting us in improving our service to the_____community.

Yours truly,

Example C: POSTCARD

NAME OF ORGANIZATION:

ADDRESS:

PHONE:

DIRECTOR:

TYPE OF SERVICE (INCLUDE HOURS & FEES WHERE APPROPRIATE):

Example D: PROFILE SHEET

DATE OF INTERVIEW: TELEPHONE:

ORGANIZATION NAME:

ADDRESS:

PERSONNEL: HEAD OF ORGANIZATION WITH TITLE:

OTHERS:

CONTACT:

PEOPLE SERVED:

GEOGRAPHIC AREA:

AGES:

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:

FEES:

SERVICES:

HOURS:

PROGRAMS:

OUTLINE OF ORGANIZATION (INCLUDING FUNDING):

PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT:

REFERRAL PROCEDURE:

Example E: LETTER TO ACCOMPANY PROFILE SHEET

LETTERHEAD

Dear

Thank you for talking with me on (date) about the services and plans of (name of agency).

As a follow-up to our conversation, I have enclosed a profile sheet of your agency. Please check to see that the information is accurate and complete, make any necessary changes, and return the sheet to us by (date).

As indicated in our discussion, the (name of library) plans to make this data available to the public through a community information file. We will assume that you agree to be included in this file unless we hear differently from you.

Again, thank you for your help in improving our service to the _____ community.

Yours truly,

CSD: COMMITTEE ON LIBRARY SERVICE TO
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